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One of the greatest threats to the viability of San Diego's small businesses is the proposed card-check plan put forward by Congressional Democrats. This plan, which unfairly denies workers of their right to a secret ballot on the question of whether to unionize, would debilitate our small business community and significantly limit the availability of jobs for American workers.

Imposing this condition on small businesses would be a serious mistake - particularly in today's tough economic times. Small businesses are the single largest job producer in the nation, providing millions of Americans with sustainable employment and wages.

Yet a recently published economic analysis reveals that unemployment will rise one percent for every three percent gain in union membership accrued through card-check. That translates into 600,000 jobs lost if union bosses are accurate in their prediction that this proposal -- deceptively introduced in Congress as the Employee Free Choice Act -- would unionize 1.5 million workers in the first year.

Supporters of this scheme also contend that small businesses with fewer than 100 employees will be exempt. They are wrong. There is absolutely no exception for small businesses in either current law or the proposed legislation. Regardless of how they choose to spin it, there is no hiding from the fact that card-check would take away workers' rights.

Under the card-check plan, a union is formed once a simple majority of workers sign public authorization cards. Nothing in the legislation protects workers against intimidation, violence or retribution. Soon after a sufficient number of cards are signed, regardless of whether others were consulted, employers are notified by the National Labor Relations Board that their workers are now unionized.

This puts small business owners at the negotiating table with savvy union leaders, fighting for their survival. The union representatives, despite their questionable intentions and self-motivated interests, would suddenly have the upper hand.

Does this mean that businesses will have to create human-resource departments, hire

expensive attorneys and understand the complex patchwork of union contracts? Very few small businesses have the resources to do so. The only options available for most businesses will either be to close their door altogether or cede to union demands. It is no wonder why small businesses are a target for unionization.

To make matters worse, the Employee Free Choice Act only gives business owners 90 days before a contract goes to a federal mediator. If an agreement is not reached during that time, the contract is then turned over to a federal arbiter for final judgment. In other words, the decisions about day-to-day operations, such as pay and benefits, will no longer be made by business owners. That responsibility will be overtaken by unions and federal bureaucrats.

It is unfortunate that when so many families are making tough choices because of job loss and declining retirement savings, there are some who still wish to undermine the role of small businesses as America's leading employer. We must not allow workers' rights and the American economy to be trampled by revoking secret ballots in the workplace. The consequences are far too severe.